

TAPE INDEXNARRATOR Clara Nielsen
Petersen

INTERVIEWER Phyllis Lotz

PLACE Hist. Museum, Santa
Ynez

DATE Feb. 4, 1980

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Interview with Clara Nielsen Petersen

Date of Interview: 4 February 1980; Hist, Museum, Santa Ynez

Interviewer: Phyllis Lotz

Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PL: Mrs. Petersen and I are looking through old pictures of Solvang.

Mrs. P. We came to Solvang in Nov. 1911. My father was Marcus and mother was Andrea and there were six children in the family. My two older sisters went to Los Angeles to find work. But the four of us children came with the folks. The Children's names were Clara, Axel, Walter and Lillian. The older two were Marie and Thora.

My father came because he always really wanted to have a store. When we came the present store, Rasmussens, was a little store. It had been built, a little old fashioned building with a square top. The man what had built this, Named Sophus Olsen. In the back end of it, they had an apartment for Mr. and Mrs. Olsen. At this time Los Olivos was the metropolis of the Valley and D.D. Davis had the big general merchandise store there. This Mr. Olsen did not have money enough to stock his store so he would get the groceries from Mr. Davis and sell on commission in Solvang. When my father came in he bought in half of the building and from then on these two, Olsen and Nielsen bought their own stock. That would be in 1912. Mrs. Olsen was not very well, she had come from the San Joaquin Valley and they had one little boy. In 1914 she wanted to go back to the San Joaquin Valley so my father bought out the Olsens. So it became the Marcus Nielsen's store.

PL: Where were you living at that time?

Mrs. P. We were living right here in Solvang, at the top of First Street now the Clock Shop and real estate office. I'm so glad they left that house. Its the only one on that side of the original homes, except way up at the corner at Atterdag and Mission, Mr. Olsen's house. We lived in that two story house on First St.

PL: Did you older sister ever come to Solvang?

Mrs. P.: They came to visit. Later my older sister married Ray Passke's father. And they came up then. Mr. Passke had a furniture store and an undertaker parlor. He had someone do the undertaking. They lived here until they passed away. My sister Thora married a Swedish man, had one son and came to live in Lompoc and had a furniture store. They later parted and Thora came back to Solvang and bought my folks original home on Mission.

PL: Were you born in America?

Mrs. P.: Oh yes! My mother was only 16 when they landed in Illinois. My father came over at the age of 21 and landed in Michigan. But then it was that they started this Danish College, like the Solvang College, Atterdag. In Tyler, Minnesota. So my father started the blacksmith shop there. My mother, living in Illinois came up to go to the college. They said when she came, "Oh, Andrea, we have just the man for you!" They called him 'the happy blacksmith.' Later on they did get married and my two older sisters were born there.

(Looking at photographs)

The original site of the Ynez School, as I understand it was where Rasmussens store is now, but they moved it north to the crossroads. I must have attended this school for a short while. I have just a grade school education and the teacher was Ynez de la Cuesta. When we came on the narrow gauge to Los Olivos we had no house so rented one in Ballard. Three of us went to school and our teacher was Miss Jeannette Lyons. We built a barn and then moved to the barn, had a row of beds on one side until the home was built.

(This is a picture showing the back of the mission and a two story building, the first school in Solvang. And the hotel.)

On the bottom floor were class rooms and for church. These buildings had been built in 1911 because they were here when we came in November. People used horses then, no automobiles, only two perhaps in Los Olivos.

The old college building was used as a restaurant after 1914, when Atterdag was finished. K.P. Knudsen had that building. The building is a restaurant, Bit O' Denmark.

Rev. Bennidict Nordentoft conferred me, I was 15. I was born in 1897.

The men lived in rooms like dorms. "Danish Nest". The young single men roomed there.

My husband came with two other boys from the San Joaquin Valley to go to school. They came on motorcycles over hill and dale from Selma. He was born there. Fred Andersen, George Petersen, and Tony Jensen, were the three boys. They came to go to the first school at Alisal and Mission. Lutheran Home was built before Atterday was torn down, in 1970. These must be the buildings of the first part of Lutheran Home.

We were married in 1925

End of Side 1, Tape 1

Begin Side 2, Tape 1

(Identifying a photo of the old schoolhouse with many people standing out front)

PL: How many grades were taught at the school?

Mrs. P.: It did not have grades. They taught both Danish and English. That really was why they had those colleges, so the immigrant who did not speak English to learn and visa versa. No graduation, you just finished. I went to conformation classes. I helped a girl from Humbolt who came to be conferred. She could speak Danish but could not read it so I helped her.

I was born in Texas. There was a Danish Colony there. There was a committee of three men who would go around looking for a colony. Dannevang was its name and it was a warm place. Morton County, Texas. My father had the first cotton gin in that county. My father was a worker and doer. Seventeen years in Texas. Dad came out here to see Solvang in June 1911 to have a look for himself. Managed to sell the gin and farm, we came out here in Nov. We traveled by train. The Larsens and my folks rented a freight car to get their goods here. We lived 13 miles from El Campo and we got on the train there. I don't remember changing train. We came in Los Angeles, then to San Luis Obispo and then down on the Pacific Coast Railroad. Oh, I remember we stayed overnight there. In

In Texas it was so flat country but in San Luis we had to climb a hill. We did not know Spanish so we were calling it Los Olives. So when the conductor called out Los Alamos we thought he said Los Olives and we were going to get off but they would not let us. Los Olivos was a busy place. William Davis's son was D.D. Davis and the daughter was Katurah Davis Cambell, and there is a story written about the Davis Family coming here.

I was connected with that store all my life. I had my sewing machine there. Our office was the old apartment of Mr. Olsen. I made the clothes of my youngest sister. I worked at the store. My Dad did not understand Spanish, but I have known four generations of Romeros. The Romeros would come driving from Santa Ynez and they always would be whistling. My Dad did not speak Spanish nor did Romero speak Danish, he was so cute. All the Sanchez's came. Pablo(Paul) is a realtor in Santa Maria. I can still see them. The boys wore a dress and their mother would sit them up on the counter to do something, and say, "No, No, Pablo." I can hear her say that. I enjoyed the store.

PL: How did you meet your husband?

Mrs. P.: He was overseas in World War I for 21 months. I had met him before, here in Solvang. He was two years older than me. It was funny, we knew each other at school, but nothing serious. There was a Young-Peoples Association, we had conventions. This time it was in Selma. I saw him there but we did not go together. My brother Axel and I became Nielsen and Nielsen, after my father gave up the store. There have been so many names to that store. We were married in 1925, I was 28, George, 30. He was a farmer. His Dad passed away when he was 16 and as he was the oldest of three boys in the family with an older sister, did you know the Skytt Family? Evald Skytt's wife is my husband's niece, Ekenrode. He was a farmer. His father had a winery in Parlier, grew grapes. The father died in his fifties. Jens Petersen was his name. He was away to war, and had to sell the farm.

PL: Do you remember the Mattei's?

Mrs. P.: Mrs. Mattei would get up every morning and fish and serve

fresh fish to the people at the tavern.

PL: And Alonzo Crabb?

Mrs. P.: Yes, they had one daughter named Blanche. I will always remember the name. He was the police officer for our dances. He was very tall and Mrs. Crabb was very short. She was of Spanish decent, her name was Della.

PL: Where was your first home after marriage?

Mrs. P.: A little gray home in the west. The Passke's had built that house, it had only one bedroom. It had a long buffet. I had the money to add on, to make it nicer. We made a sun room with a couch for guests. That was before our children were born. "Moonlight and Roses" was one of the songs I remember. My husband had a beautiful singing voice and we would play the victrola and sing. He loved to sing. Our sons were born in the bedroom of the little gray house. The doctor was Dr. Hanze. He came up from the fair. They called Dr. Heiges from Lompoc, he came first. Robert was born first.

End of Side 2, Tape 1